

Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers June 20, 2003

In the News...

California Assembly Passes Bill Prohibiting Holding and Talking on Cellular Phone While Driving

The debate over using a wireless phone while driving continues in California. On May 29, 2003, the California Assembly passed a bill prohibiting holding and talking on a cellular phone while driving. The bill has moved to the California Senate. Despite growing support for the bill, many state Senators oppose the bill because it does not broadly address other driver distractions. This is California's third attempt to pass this legislation. **For the full New York Times article, visit** <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/10/national/10CELL.html>.

Thousands of U.K. Fleet Decision-Makers Back New "Get Trained" Campaign

U.K. fleet decision-makers -- from secretaries to fleet managers, human resource managers, finance directors and managing directors -- have given their backing to a call for better training for fleet managers. In an overwhelming show of support, 96% of fleet decision-makers, responsible for thousands of vehicles, backed the "Get Trained" campaign. Fleet News launched the 'Get Trained' campaign last week, following a long-running debate about the cost to businesses of employing unskilled staff to look after the operation of company car fleets. UK industry experts fear tens of millions of pounds are wasted every year by companies because they are not running their fleets efficiently. Companies could be using the wrong funding options, or not choosing vehicles effectively. They could be failing to assess running costs, not training or managing drivers properly, misunderstanding the cost of accidents or ignoring important new legislation. Even fleets where day-to-day management has been outsourced cannot wash their hands of responsibility for drivers, amid the renewed focus on health and safety and an employer's duty of care to staff.

Two of Four NHTSA High Priority Reports Released

Need comments? As part of its effort to improve safety by examining four high priority safety concerns, NHTSA has released reports on the first two to be addressed -- vehicle compatibility and rollover mitigation. **Both reports are now available on NHTSA's website at** <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/iptreports.html>. The two other priority issues being examined in this manner are impaired driving and safety belt use.

Proposed California Bill Will Cut Use of SUVs as State Vehicles

Two senior California officials, flanked by environmental lobbyists and "Seinfeld" star Julia Louis-Dreyfus, last Thursday proposed a law that would bar most state agencies from buying SUVs. The bill, spearheaded by Senate President Pro Tem John Burton and State Treasurer Phil Angelides, would exempt state police and emergency services but force other agencies to justify an SUV purchase because of concerns over safety, cost and the environment. "We're going to drive the state to a new policy," Angelides told reporters in San Francisco, arguing that cash-strapped California would save money with smaller cars. California's car fleet numbers about 73,000. An estimated 7.5 percent to 10 percent of state vehicles are SUVs, which account for up to 25 percent of total U.S. vehicle sales. The bill is expected to face a tough fight in the state's legislature.

You Drink & Drive. You Lose. National Crackdown to Begin June 27th

With more people expected to be on the highways during the Fourth of July holiday, this could be one of the deadliest periods ever for impaired driving fatalities. To protect families during this long holiday weekend, local law enforcement agencies will be out in full force, June 27 to July 13, 2003, as part of the You Drink and Drive. You Lose. National Crackdown to keep citizens safe from impaired drivers. The National Crackdown is a partnership of criminal justice and traffic safety partners in all 50 States joining forces to catch impaired drivers and to lock them up. Local law enforcement will be out in full force conducting saturation patrols and sobriety checkpoints to identify and arrest impaired drivers. **For more state or regional information on this campaign, visit the weekly update at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/july4planner-03/ydydydjune13.htm>.**

UK Police Force Warns Employers that Officers Will Investigate Following Fatal Crashes

One of the United Kingdom's largest police forces has warned employers that officers will come knocking on their doors in the event of an accident involving company drivers. South Yorkshire Police gave the warning at a major seminar last week where it also outlined the role employers should play in the event of a fatal accident involving a fleet driver. This role could include providing detailed information against possible prosecution but also extends to helping bereaved families. Roads police sergeant Mike Fillingham said the force was attempting to change attitudes towards car crashes "People don't tend to look at them as a crime. We ask why it happened and who else may be liable to prosecution. We will look at the state of the vehicle and how it is maintained – that includes looking at company maintenance records and interviewing directors, other drivers and maintenance staff." Sgt Fillingham said it was vital companies put safety before profitability in terms of fleet drivers, adding: "Following an incident companies find it difficult to justify putting profits first. There can also be bad publicity arising from a collision."

NHTSA Recommends Dozens of New Safety Initiatives to Reduce Rollover Crashes and Protect Occupants Involved in SUV and Truck Crashes

NHTSA recommended dozens of new safety initiatives last Thursday to reduce rollover crashes and protect occupants in cars that crash with sport utility vehicles and other trucks. The recommendations include new safety ratings that tell consumers how well vehicles handle in abrupt maneuvers and a complete overhaul of the federal regulation for protecting occupants in side-impact crashes. Responding to growing concerns about rollovers and compatibility, NHTSA formed several task forces in September 2002 to look at ways to reduce SUV-related injuries and deaths and to provide more information to consumers. Rollover crashes killed more than 10,000 in 2001 and that number is on the rise. NHTSA said much of the increase is due to the higher percentage of SUVs on the road. To reduce rollovers, NHTSA is considering for the first time a program to evaluate how well vehicles handle in emergencies because vehicles with more responsive steering will help drivers stay on the road. NHTSA may publish ratings to help consumers choose vehicles with better handling characteristics. That could spur more automakers to introduce technologies such as electronic stability control, which automatically corrects steering if a driver is veering off the road. NHTSA will study different tests before proceeding with any kind of evaluation or consumer information program. NHTSA also wants automakers to use safety belt reminder systems. NHTSA estimates that 78 percent of those killed in rollover crashes are unbelted. At the same time, NHTSA will upgrade its roof-strength requirements. Currently, vehicles must have a roof strong enough to bear 1.5 times their weight. Critics say the test does not replicate the violence of a real-world rollover crash. NHTSA also said increased seat belt use, stronger windows, side-curtain air bags and better door latches could play a role in preventing occupants from being ejected during a crash, which is key to survival. **For more**

information, visit the NHTSA website at <http://www.autonews.com/news.cms?newsId=5578> or <http://www.autonews.com/news.cms?newsId=5574>.

NTSB Calls for Ban on Cell Phone Use by Novice Drivers

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said recently that the nation's driver education courses should include warnings about the dangers of distracted driving, and novice drivers should be prohibited from using cell phones while at the wheel. These were two of the recommendations contained in the NTSB's final report on its investigation into a highway crash last year that took the lives of five persons, including a driver who was using a wireless phone at the moment she lost control of her vehicle. **For the full executive summary and to view the press release, visit the NTSB website at <http://www.nts.gov/publicn/2003/HAR0302.htm> or <http://www.nts.gov/Pressrel/2003/030603.htm>.**

With Telematics Industry Growth Projected to Grow to \$20 Billion by 2010, Inattentive Drivers Becomes a Major Highway Safety Concern

Inattentive drivers are becoming a major highway safety concern due to an increasing number of potentially distracting high-tech gadgets on vehicle dashboards and more drivers using cell phones, safety officials say. The telematics industry, which makes such gadgets, is expected to grow to \$20 billion a year by 2010, according to market research firms. But also growing is the concern over how cell phones, pagers, personal digital assistants and navigational systems might affect safety. Auto companies and suppliers are racing to come up with their own solutions before the federal government imposes regulations or more state governments put restrictions on a lucrative business.

NHTSA Announces Initial Set of Ratings for Child Safety Seats

NHTSA announced its initial set of ratings for child safety seats based on their ease of use. The first-ever results were released at a news conference in Washington involving NHTSA, Consumers Union, and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Under NHTSA's new rating system, child safety seats - including booster seats - are given an overall ease-of-use rating at the "A," "B," or "C" level. Such letter grades are also used to rate seats in each of five categories:

- Whether the seat is pre-assembled or requires assembly after purchase.
- Clarity of labeling attached to the seat.
- Clarity of written instructions on the seat's proper use.
- Ease of securing a child in the seat.
- Whether the seat has features that make it easier to install in a vehicle.

To date, 68 seats have been rated by NHTSA, representing about 95 percent of the seats available to consumers. Thirty-nine overall "A" ratings were given and 68 overall "B" ratings were given. While no seat received an overall "C" rating, several received a "C" rating in one or more individual rating categories. The new child safety seat ease-of-use rating system is in response to the Transportation Recall Enhancement, Accountability, and Documentation (TREAD) Act of 2000. Also at the news conference, the three organizations said that the new child safety seat system known as "Lower Attachments and Tethers for Children" (LATCH) is making child safety seats easier to use, but there are some implementation issues that still need to be addressed. **For more information, visit the NHTSA website at www.nhtsa.dot.gov or <http://www.autonews.com/news.cms?newsId=5566>.**

From Speeding to Eating, Cell Phones to Reading the Newspaper, U.S. Motorists Admit to Bad Driving Habits

From speeding to eating, cell phones to reading the newspaper, almost all U.S. motorists admit to bad driving habits, according to a survey released last week by Drive for Life: The National Safe Driving Test and Initiative, a group that promotes driver education. Ninety-one percent of those surveyed said they engaged in at least one risky activity while driving. The national poll of more than 1,100 licensed drivers found that 56 percent identified "inattentive drivers" as the greatest threat to driving safety. Seven in 10 respondents admitted to driving a little above the speed limit occasionally, which topped the list of bad habits. Other risky practices drivers admitted to: 35 percent cross on a red or yellow light; 27 percent do not use directional signals; 13 percent admitted to aggressive driving. The survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

NJ Transportation Commissioner Reiterated Call for Motorists to Do Their Part

Transportation Commissioner Jack Lettiere reiterated his call for motorists to do their part and recognize that safety lies within the hands of drivers. "Highway safety is goal that we can only reach together - the Department of Transportation (DOT), law enforcement and motorists," said Lettiere. Lettiere unveiled the first of 500 new "Safety First" awareness signs to be installed on all state highways as a part of the department's ongoing highway safety campaign. The "Safety First" signs, which NJDOT will install over the next year on all state highways include several different messages such as Buckle Up, Keep Your Distance and the successful #77 aggressive driver hotline.

Poor Condition of Urban Roads Costs Drivers \$396 a Year

One-fourth of the nation's urban roads are in poor condition, costing motorists an average \$396 a year in repairs, wear and reduced mileage, a new report says. Road conditions are likely to worsen as state and local governments, battling financial problems, fall behind on maintenance, according to a study to be recently released by The Road Information Program (TRIP), a research group financed by road builders, unions of construction workers and other transportation interests. The study is one of many expected in the next several weeks as industry, government and safety groups seek more money from Congress, which is debating a six-year spending bill for highways. **For more information, visit the TRIP website at <http://www.tripnet.org/national/nnrBumpyRoads052703.htm>.**

Daimler Chrysler Demonstrates Onboard Electronics System Designed to Keep Driver's Focused on the Road During Critical Driving Situations

Daimler Chrysler recently demonstrated an onboard electronics system designed to keep the driver's focus on the road during critical driving situations. The system, called Driver Advocate(TM), was developed by Motorola and installed in a Chrysler Town & Country minivan. Driver Advocate incorporates a user-friendly three-button mechanism installed on the steering wheel to enable the driver to control the in-flow of information from cell phones, onboard navigation systems, and warning messages or diagnostic messages appearing on the Electronic Vehicle Information Center (EVIC). **For more information, visit <http://www.media.daimlerchrysler.com>.**

U.S. Transportation Secretary Announces \$693 Million FHWA Discretionary Funds for Infrastructure Projects

U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta announced \$693 million in Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) discretionary funds for infrastructure projects in 50 states and the District of Columbia. The 498 grants were provided to the states in seven categories. The categories, number of grants and the totals provided, are:

- Borders and Corridors, 129 grants in 43 states, \$255 million

- Transportation and Community and System Preservation Pilot (TCSP) program, 113 grants in 37 states, \$73.9 million
- Interstate Maintenance, 54 grants in 30 states, \$99.4 million
- Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation, 32 grants in 25 states, \$68.6 million
- Public Lands Highways, 59 grants in 29 states, \$78.3 million
- Ferry Boats and Terminals, 20 grants in 13 states, \$17.9 million
- Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), 91 projects in 43 states, \$99.8 million.

Totals for the states and the District of Columbia are on the Internet at
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/discretionary/fy03congdes.htm>.

Delaware Highway Safety Office Teams Up With Employers to Discourage Alcohol Impaired Driving

The Delaware Office of Highway Safety is teaming with employers throughout the state in a safety campaign unveiled recently to discourage drivers from getting behind the wheel after they drink. The campaign, called "DUI ... when a drink costs more than you think," aims at educating the public about the financial, legal and social consequences associated with a first-time DUI offense. Not only do these offenders lose their drivers licenses for a minimum of 60 days, but they are burdened with about \$4,000 combined in court costs, attorney fees and mandatory alcohol and education classes. For the offender's employer, time off from work to attend court and alcohol rehabilitation programs costs in lost productivity. Last year, 72 percent of Delaware's 5,845 DUI arrests were first-time offenders. That figure is up 5 percent from the previous year, officials said.

Travelers Through Toronto Receive SARS Warnings

U.S. border authorities are quietly on the lookout for signs of the SARS virus in travelers entering the United States from Canada. Concern about the potential spread to the U.S. during Toronto's first outbreak more than a month ago prompted U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer of New York to seek more involvement by the Homeland Security Department and CDC in the screening of travelers at international bridge crossings. Concern escalated earlier this week after a truck driver who commuted from Buffalo, N.Y. to Toronto over a period of several weeks was deemed as a suspect case. U.S. Customs authorities say agents have received written training to spot signs of the severe acute respiratory syndrome virus. And anyone who tells agents they have been in or near Toronto is given a printed warning about SARS.